

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program Arizona Game & Fish Department; Habitat and Fisheries Branches

Public Open House for Preparation of Draft Environmental Assessment for Sport Fish Stocking in Arizona

AGENCY: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 2 Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program

ACTION: Preparation of a Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA); notice of public scoping period; request for comments.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1970, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), Region 2 Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR), and the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), intend to jointly prepare a Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) to assess the social, economic and environmental effects related to WSFR funding AGFD to continue to stock sport fish in Arizona lakes and streams. The proposed action is authorized and funded under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950, as amended (SFRA). The DEA will assess potential impacts of a range of alternatives, including the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives. Publication of this notice begins an early and open process for determining the extent and variety of issues to be addressed in the DEA including any significant issues related to the proposed action. This notice requests public participation in the process and provides information on how to participate.

DATES/TIMES: The comment period for the scoping process is open through 5:00 pm, December 19, 2008. Three public open houses will be held to provide information on the proposed action to the public and to solicit written public input. The meeting dates and locations are:

November 17, 2008 @ 6:30 pm Arizona Game and Fish Department Region 1 office
2878 E. White Mountain Blvd. Pinetop, AZ 85935.

November 24, 2008 @ 6:30 pm Arizona Game and Fish Department Region 5 office, 555
N. Greasewood Road, Tucson, AZ 85745.

November 25, 2008 @ 6:30 pm at Arizona Game and Fish Department Phoenix
Headquarters, 5000 W. Carefree Highway, Phoenix, AZ 85086.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Mr. Harold Namminga, Sport Fish Restoration Grant Administrator, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, NM 87103.
Telephone: (505) 248-7461 or

Mr. David Weedman, Aquatic Habitat Program Coordinator, Arizona Game and Fish Department, 5000 W. Carefree Highway, Phoenix, AZ 85086, Telephone: (623) 236-7607.

Public Meetings

AGFD and USFWS will hold open houses to provide an opportunity for the public and concerned parties to submit in person written comments on issues related to the continued stocking of sport fish into Arizona waterbodies. Comments will be used to help identify and refine the scope of the issues to be addressed in the DEA. Written comments must include the author's name and address. All comments will be placed in the public docket.

All of the public open house locations are wheelchair-accessible. If you plan to attend and need special assistance such as sign language interpretation or other reasonable accommodation, please notify the USFWS or AGFD (at the addresses or phone numbers above) at least 3 business days in advance. Include your contact information as well as information about your specific needs.

Request for Comments

Comments may be submitted in writing anytime during the public comment period (see DATES/TIMES). Written comment submissions should include your name and address and supporting information. Fax WSFR at (505) 248-7471 or mail or hand deliver your comments to:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program
c/o Harold Namminga
P.O. Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103-1306

or

- Arizona Game and Fish Department
c/o Dave Weedman
5000 West Carefree Highway
Phoenix, AZ 85086

Written comments may also be submitted by email to fishaz@azgfd.gov . Please refer to Arizona Game and Fish Department Sport Fish Stocking Draft EA in the Subject line.

Your written comments - including personal identifying information, such as name, address, phone number, email address - may be made publicly available at any time. While you may ask that personal identifying information be withheld from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The proposed action is authorized under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950 (SFRA) (16 U.S.C. 777-777k, 64 Stat. 430) commonly referred to as the Dingell-Johnson Act or Wallop-Breaux Act. It provides Federal aid to state wildlife agencies for management and restoration of fish having material value in connection with sport or recreation in the marine and/or fresh waters of the United States. Funds distributed to the States are derived from a 10-percent excise tax on certain items of sport fishing tackle, a 3% excise tax on fish finders and electric trolling motors, import duties on fishing tackle, yachts and pleasure craft, interest on the account, and a portion of motorboat fuel tax revenues and small engine fuel taxes. WSFR has the authority to approve grants and provide SFRA funds to states for sport fish management activities.

Arizona's natural fish fauna historically consisted of 36 species of fish, only two of which were traditionally sought by early Americans for sport fishing, the Apache and Gila trout. Since the early 1900's, the AGFD and other agencies, have supplemented recreational angling opportunities by stocking state waters with sport fish species. The AGFD manages sport fishing resources in two broad categories, reflecting cold water fisheries (cold water species such as trout) and warm water fisheries (warm water species such as largemouth bass). Management of these waters is based on biology, angler use, partnership commitments and needs, and social demands.

Recreational angling in Arizona creates a statewide economic impact of more than \$1.1 billion annually. In 2007, AGFD sold 375,158 fishing licenses, generating revenue of \$8.8 million. During the last six years, AGFD has stocked approximately 3 million fish per year. The majority of stockings were cold or cool water species, such as rainbow, Apache, brook, cutthroat, and brown trout, and walleye. Approximately one percent of fish stocked were warm water species, including channel catfish, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, bluegill, and hybrid sunfish. The majority of angler use is maintained through natural reproduction and recruitment of sport fish populations and not by the stocking program.

Purpose and Need

PURPOSE: The Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (16 U.S.C. 777-777k, 64 Stat.430) directs the FWS to provide Federal aid to States for the management and restoration of fish having "material value in connection with sport or recreation in the marine and/or fresh waters of the United States." To fulfill this legislative mandate, the USFWS proposes to fund, in part, the AGFD program of stocking sport fishes in selected waters of Arizona to provide opportunities for recreational fishing.

NEED: Each year thousands of anglers take advantage of recreational fishing opportunities in Arizona that are provided by the sport fish stocking program. In 2006 there were 4,156,000 angler days of fishing in Arizona (2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service). Sport Fish Restoration funding will make

it possible for AGFD to continue to meet and sustain much of this demand for public recreational angling opportunities in Arizona waters.

Alternatives

Proposed Action Alternative

Under the proposed action, WSFR would continue to provide SFRA funds to AGFD for sport fish stocking at approximately 158 locations in urban and rural Arizona.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, WSFR would not provide SFRA funds to AGFD to support sport fish stocking. (Because of State statutory and public trust requirements, AGFD would attempt to continue to stock sport fish, seeking other funding sources to replace Federal funds.)

Other Alternatives

In the DEA, WSFR would consider a range of alternatives that could accomplish action's purpose and need, including stocking programs that differ in species and/or location from the proposed alternative.